WELLES, GIDEON DRAWER 10B CABINET

71.2009.085.03444

Abraham Lincoln's Cabinet

Gideon Welles

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the

Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

71.2009.085.03964

LINCOLN AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES.

The first instalments of the Diary of Gideon Welles, now publishing in the *Atlantic*, furnish us with one more means of measuring Lincoln with his contemporaries. In those dark days of 1863, Welles was not visibly under the spell of Lincoln's genius; he did not think that everything the President did was right and wise; the mythic faculty had not then begun to work. Yet in the matter-of-fact and impartial record which the cool Secretary of the Navy set down at the time of the Cabinet intrigue to secure the removal and disgrace of McClellan, the greatness of Lincoln is builded by Welles better than he knew. Stanton appears testy, vindictive, scheming; Chase was jealous, vain, meddling; Seward indifferent, when not tricky and dodging. Lincoln, throughout, was calm, patient, honorable, and of a sagacity overtopping the combined wits of his advisers.

The just way of judging a man is to endeavor to see how he ranks with those of his own generation, and how he meets the highest standards of his own time. To compare him with the great ones of another century, earlier or later, or to test him by moral or political principles not acknowledged, or not vivid, in his day, is to destroy historical perspective. It would be absurd, for example, to appraise Lincoln as a civil-service reformer. The thing had not swum into his ken. He practised the spoils system in the innocence of ignorance. For the true searching of his character we must look to the way in which he bowed before the categorical imperatives that tried the stuff of public men at the time he actually lived; and place him, to find his true rank, alongside his fellows.

It may be said that Abraham Lincoln as President was as much superior to the statesmen about him as George Washington, when President, was to the men whom his lofty presence dwarfed. But there was this difference: Washington's preëminence had been achieved and was generally acknowledged in 1789. Lincoln's was not only not admitted, but was denied, in 1861. Neither Knox nor Hamilton, nor even Jefferson, dreamed of challenging Washington; but Lincoln had at least two men in his Cabinet who thought themselves much his better, and took no pains to conceal this notion. It was with something almost like contempt for Lincoln's ability that Seward wrote that amazing letter to him, early in his Administration, practically offering to take upon himself the functions of the President. Readers will recall the gasp of astonishment with which that extraordinary communication was received when it was first given to the light in the Hay and Nicolay "Life." It was a fearful ordeal for the Illinois lawyer, unskilled in statesmanship. Here was his Secretary of State, the brilliant, the admired, the favorite of the educated classes, not only proposing to him the madcap policy of defying the world in arms, so as to unite the dissevered parts of the country, but plainly intimating his disbelief in the President's capacity and initiative, and proffering himself as the leader and saviour of a feeble Administration. A timid man would have been frightened, and either yielded to Seward or pretended to, while planning to get rid of him. A sensitive and violent man would have flown into a passion, lost the services of Seward, and disrupted his Administration at the very start. Lincoln did neither. He quietly let Seward know that he expected both to direct his own Administration and to have from his Secretary of State loyal coöperation. It was as easily and naturally done as if it were merely a case of adjusting the relations of a lawyer and his chief clerk in a Springfield office, but it was a crowning proof of Lincoln's magnanimity and fitness for great affairs of state. Seward never wrote him any more letters of that tenor! He had got his lesson.

This incident, first known more than two decades after Lincoln's death, well illustrates the way in which his fame has been heightened by all the disclosures of the lapsing years. Letters, diaries, archives have yielded their secrets, but not one of them has diminished Lincoln's stature. On the other hand, the reputation of his rivals has been deeply gnawed into by the tooth

of time. Seward, we have referred to; he has been hurt, not helped, by what has been published since he quitted the scene. Chase has suffered almost more. His great abilities and undoubted patriotism were eaten into by the acid of ambition, so that he stands before us often petty, querulous, exigent, intriguing, and discontented. But perhaps none of Lincoln's contemporaries has had his once great fame more dimmed than Horace Greeley. He, too, felt himself above Lincoln by a thousand diameters; yet from the pitch of his assumed greatness as a statesman, he has fallen grievously, as history has set the forces of truth at work. Impatient, vacillating, impetuous, vainglorious (consult that letter which he wrote to Lincoln complaining that great men were getting to be few, and that even his own health was not good!), Greeley was about as ill-fitted for high office as a man could be. He thought himself a great politician, but even there Lincoln beat him out of sight. Greeley's fatuousness in misjudging a political movement has just now been once more strikingly proved in a letter published by the biographers of Carl Schurz. Anything more pathetically absurd than his confidence that he was going to be elected President in 1872, when the very heavens were thundering the ruin of his campaign, it would be hard to find.

This sort of comparison may seem too feebly panegyrical for the Lincoln centenary. Yet when the poets and the orators have done their best, after legend and myth-making have begun, it is well to consider Lincoln in habit as he was, a man among men. When we perceive how the near-great or the over-great public men of his own life-time fall away from him, as he and they recede, and leave him towering above them in unmatched largeness of soul and reach of mind, we can at least feel that our appraisement of him is sure. Saul is higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward.

1909

C U

Lincoln's Navy Secretary Led Fight for League Island

When Navy Day comes around on October 27, some Philadelphians may recall that it was on Navy Day, 1916, that the transport Henderson slid down the ways, the first ship to be launched at League Island.

But not many will know that there was a half a century of political jockeying, sectional jealousy and neglect of Naval power before what is now the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard came into its own.

Today the Naval Shipyard has 10,800 civilian employes, plus 209 military. The staff at district headquarters numbers 246, and at the Air Material Center there are 4,641. That's a total of 15,895.

But in 1862—and that's when League Island first was proposed to fill the need for an iron-working navy yard—the island was made up of 260 acres of "old meadow," and 150 acres of "new meadow," or reclaimed marshland.

Advantages of Location

It was its location, at the convergence of the Delaware and the Schuylkill, the suitability of the fresh water for laying up iron vessels, and the broad channel between it and the mainland that led Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, to fight for it as a yard equipped to handle iron-ship construction and repair.

How the proposal, eagerly received in Philadelphia, was fought back and forth on the floors of Congress; how New England battled to have the yard placed at New London, and how Philadelphia finally won out is the subject of an article, "The Genesis of a Navy Yard," in the current Naval Institute Proceedings.

The article is by Arthur Menzies Johnson, who served in the Air Force during World War II and the Korean conflict, and now holds a commission as a captain in the U. S. Air Force Reserve. He is an assistant professor in the department of English, history and government at the U. S. Naval Academy at Annapolis.

Johnson tells how, in Congress, Phihladelphia was proposed for the site because of the availability of mechanics and good machinery here, as well as its proximity to coal and iron. In the House, Congressman William D. Kelley, of Philadelphia, pictured the area glowingly as the "largest manufacturing county in the world."

Welles Determined

The League Island bill finally became law on July 15, 1863. But the battle was far from over. Despite Welles' determination to have the site on the Delaware, the New London backers put up strong resistance. Some New Londoners, says Johnson, expressed their dissatisfaction by hanging Welles in effigy on a tree in State st.

So loudly did the sectional and political guns roar that Congress failed to take the action necessary to establish the yard here. But in his annual report for 1863 the doughty Welles was still firing away. "It has appeared to me," he wrote, "that no place combines so many advantages as are to be found on the Delaware, in the vicinity of Philadelphia."

President Lincoln was on Welles' side as far as the new type of navy yard was concerned, but he took no sides in the fight over the location.

Finally the differences were reconciled, and on December 22, 1868, Mayor Morton McMichael, of Philadelphia, presented the deed and other necessary papers at the Navy Department.

Even then, League Island languished for years. Construction and improvements proceeded with less than sailing-ship speed. Johnson "received the full mission for which Welles had pleaded with Congress a half-century before."

First Ship Construction

Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels designated the yard for construction of Transport No. 1, subsequently named the U. S. S. Henderson, Congress authorized the building of shipways, and on Navy Day, 1915, the keel was laid.

The Henderson was ready for launching by the following Navy Day. About 20,000 watched the ship glide smoothly into the Delaware. Cheer after cheer went up.

E 985 SUMNER. A.L.S., 4pp, 8vo, Cotuit, Mass., July 5, 1865. To Gideon Welles, Secretary of Navy under Lincoln. ". . . History does not repeat itself so precisely; but the President and his Cabinet seem to me now to repeat the conduct of Mr. Buchanan and his Cabinet when the Rebellion first began to show itself. State Rights were then set up, and we were told that we cannot 'coerce a State.' Now that the 2nd stage of the Rebellion has been reached, these same State Rights are set up against those Safeguards and Securities which are essential to peace and tranquility, without which the War will have failed . . . I do not doubt that the present policy which is of the Paine type will also be overruled," etc. · $7.50

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 950 FORT WAYNE, INDIANA June 23, 1947

GIDEON WELLES—NAVY DEPARTMENT

Abraham Lincoln returning from a visit to his son in school at Exeter, New Hampshire, made an address at Hartford, Connecticut, on Monday, March 5, 1860, and a leading citizen of the city, Gideon Welles, was on the committee of arrangements. Lincoln and Welles met the following morning for a chat on politics in the office of the *Evening Post* and this informal talk may have had much to do with fixing in Lincoln's mind the availability of this Connecticut Yankee for his cabinet. One other meeting with Welles must have left a favorable impression with Lincoln as the Connecticut man was on the notification committee which came to Springfield after the Chicago convention to officially advise Lincoln of his nomination. Although Welles favored Chase over Lincoln at the convention, other delegates from Connecticut went for Lincoln on the first ballot.

With the possible exception of Caleb Smith, Welles would rank as the member of the cabinet with the least prestige, and that fact is responsible for introducing him thus early in this series of brief monographs on the cabinet members.

The procedure in securing Welles as a member of the official family is known to all Lincoln students. At one of the conferences in Chicago with Vice President elect Hamlin covering the period of November 20, 21, and 22, 1860, Lincoln said, "You shall have the right, Mr. Hamlin, to name the New England member of the cabinet." On December 10, 1860, about three weeks after this conference Gideon Welles wrote a letter to Lincoln cautioning him that the South was but awaiting some "fancied overt act on the part of the incoming administration" and further consulting Lincoln on not being forced into some position "until it becomes a duty." This letter must have done much to elevate Welles in Lincoln's esteem.

Two weeks after Lincoln received the Welles letter on December 24, he wrote to Hamlin making some suggestions for the Vice President elect's consideration. He said: "I need a man of Democratic antecedents from New England. I cannot get a fair share of that element in without. This stands in the way of Mr. Adams. I think of Governor Banks, Mr. Welles, and Mr. Tuck. Which of them do the New England delegations prefer? Or shall I decide for myself?"

Mr. Hamlin assumed the responsibility for making the selection and Mr. Welles apparently was his choice.

GIDEON WELLES

Born, Glastonbury, Conn., July 1, 1802

Student at Norwich University

Editor of Hartford Times 1826-1836

Democratic Member of Conn. Legislature 1827-1835

Comptroller of Conn., 1835, 1842, 1843

Contributor to the *New York Evening Post*

Postmaster of Hartford 1836-1841 under Van Buren

Divisional Chief in Navy Dept. 1846-1849 under Polk

Identified himself with the Republican Party in 1855

Candidate for Governor of Conn. in 1856

Member of Rep. Nat. Committee 1856-1864

Chairman of Connecticut delegation to Chicago Convention in 1860

Member of Notification Committee at Chicago Convention in 1860

Sworn in as Secretary of the Navy on March 5, 1861.

Several factors may have entered into the naming of Welles for the Navy post and one at least would be a sort of precedent which had been established by former Presidents of placing a New England man in the office. Welles also had some training in the Navy Department during the Polk administration. Furthermore his father, Samuel Welles, was the owner of a shipyard and engaged in maritime business. There can be no doubt that Welles by environment, by training, and by precedent, qualified for the office of Secretary of the Navy. He was appointed by the joint recommendation of the President and Vice President for the Navy portfolio on March 4, 1861, and the following morning the oath of office was administered by Chief Justice Taney.

The appointment of Welles was not altogether satisfactory to some of his friends who would have preferred to see him Postmaster General and especially the Senate Naval Committee of which Senator Hale was the chairman was not enthused at the naming of Welles. An excerpt from a letter written by John P. Usher to R. W. Thompson on December 26, 1861, states: "I hear that the Senate Naval Committee have unaimously petitioned the President to remove Welles and I think they will yet be as decisive with Mr. Cameron." Welles was able to weather the storm but held great animosity towards Senator Hale whom he called "a Senatorial buffoon." Welles eventually secured the support of most of the members of the Naval Committee.

Although it is accepted generally that Welles conducted his department so as to invite less criticism than that brought against some other departments he will probably be longest remembered as the "diary writing" member of the cabinet. The publishing in 1911 of such portions of his diary as relate to the Civil War and Reconstruction Days put his name prominently before the people.

An earlier publication by Welles with the title *Seward and Lincoln*, brought from the press in 1874, received wide acclaim by admirers of Lincoln. It was published in refutation of some conclusions made by Charles Francis Adams in his address on "Memorial Address on the Life, Character, and Services of William H. Seward."

No member of the cabinet was more loyal to the President than his Secretary of the Navy who was still serving in that capacity at the time of the President's demise.

Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy

WELLES, GIDEON. Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy. A.L.S., 4 pages, Washington, 1861. A very fine war letter reading in part:

"Matters and things, I think, are moving very well. I should better like an onward movement on the part of the troops, but the President is ordering all for the best. The country will come well out of this conflict, the Government will be made stronger as the State will likely be weaker. Our Government and institutions are undergoing some changes, wisely adapted, I hope, to the great increase. It was the weakness and errors of the late administration that developed this state of things."

The letter is in fine condition and is addressed to his brother Thaddeus Welles.

[145] $35.00

The Month at Goodspeeds
June 1966 Vol XXXVII - No 9

at the lower right "A View of the lines thrown upon Boston Neck by the Ministerial Army." P. Lee Phillips (*Notes on the Life and Works of Bernard Romans*) quotes the cartographer's proposal to print this map—the advt. dated Philadelphia, July 12, 1775—which appeared in the August 3rd issue of Rivington's *New-York Gazette* and a further notice in the same newspaper on August 31:

"August 18th. Boston. Romans' Map is just printed, will in a few days be published, and sold by James Rivington, and Messrs. Noel and Hazard [the two latter being New York booksellers]. This Map of Boston, &c. is one of the most correct that has ever been published. The draught was taken by the most skillful draughtsman in all America, and who was on the spot at the engagements of Lexington and Bunker's Hill."

Perhaps the copywriter embroidered a bit. We supposed that in the month of the battles of Lexington and Concord Romans was on that Connecticut expedition in New York State. The map is without imprint, but Evans 14444 (*American Bibliography*) gives "[Philadelphia: Printed by Robert Aitken, August, 1775.]" Sabin 72994 (*Dictionary of Books Relating to America*) mentions the Romans map but apparently had not seen it. It is not in Hildeburn's *Issues of the Press in Pennsylvania* nor in Sargent's *Imprints of James Rivington,* though that New York Tory printer might be taken for the map's publisher. At any rate, Romans' 'Map of the Seat of Civil War' in 1775 is extremely rare.

We are puzzled by Phillips's measurements of the map—16½ by 17¾ inches. Including the margins, our impression measures 16½ by 21¼ inches and the platemark size seems to be about 15½ by 18. At all events ours has full margins, though marginal tears have been repaired, with damage to three or four letters. It is in black and white (colored copies are known). One of the rarest of Revolutionary maps—$1,500.

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY WELLES

MS. on Secession, Reconstruction, Negroes

Because he had white whiskers and wore a wig to match, Gideon Welles of Connecticut was known to Lincoln and

'E CIVIL WAR", 1775 . . . page 260

the Navy Department as Father Welles. Because his manner was stern, Charles A. Dana called him "that old Mormon deacon" (he was an Episcopalian). Because his speech and writings were often caustic, to Gamaliel Bradford he was "the crusty Welles, who leaves no illusions unshattered." He was all of these, and some of their contraries, as well as a capable and conscientious public official. He was Secretary of the Navy under both Lincoln and Johnson. The Department and the ships were, in the spring of 1861, almost negligible as an instrument of war but four springs later the Navy had become a first-class fighting machine, for which much credit belongs to Welles.

He began his political life as a Jeffersonian Democrat and a strong Andrew Jackson man, but left their party on the slavery issue and helped found the Republican. He was not an Abolitionist and disliked extremists on both sides. He later supported Lincoln's plans for a soft Reconstruction and was with Johnson in the latter's vain attempt to execute them. It was his belief that the war was fought not against states but against rebellious individuals and he feared that hasty general emancipation would be economically and socially disastrous to both masters and slaves.

Upon his retirement in 1869, after more than forty years in public life, Welles had leisure to write of the events and the men he had encountered in the greatest drama of our national history. We have the original manuscript of one such composition, occupying fourteen octavo pages, with many author's revisions. We do not know whether it ever was printed. At any rate it does not seem to have appeared in the monthly *Galaxy,* where most of his post-war work was published. Its subjects are the great ones of his time—secession, the war, reconstruction, the Negroes. He also writes on questions no less critical to our own—extremism, civil rights, and "one man, one vote." The manuscript mentions Lincoln and Johnson.

"The great and important questions before the country . . . relate to the reestablishment of those fraternal relations which existed between the states before the rebellion. . . . The war . . . was a war for the maintenance of the Union. The Union is to be maintained by respecting the rights of the states. . . . There have been grumblings . . . [by] the people of the South, as much towards their leaders as towards the loyal portion of their countrymen, for their sufferings and afflictions. We

The great and important questions before the country at the present time relate to the re-establishment of those fraternal relations which existed between the states before the rebellion but which were interrupted by that event. It is the paramount duty of all good citizens, whatever may have been their past associations to contribute to the restoration of the union and I shall cheerfully and sincerely fellowship in political action with those who labor to that end, and shall be opposed to those who are striving to prevent it.

The war through which we have passed was a war for the maintenance of the Union,

have also . . . felt sore and agrieved. . . . But the memory of past wrongs and injuries and schemes to avenge them do not tend to promote unity and peace. . . .

"Measures for the restitution of the Union had been already initiated by President Lincoln and his cabinet, when he was struck down by an assassin. But President Johnson immediately adopted . . . the line of policy which had been commenced

. . . and was promoting it with success. The prospect that the broken relations . . . would be repaired . . . gladdened our hearts, when the President was confronted by . . . extremists who insisted that the Union is broken up, that the states are divided or reduced to a territorial condition, and that eleven of them shall be . . . deprived of the representation guaranteed to them by the constitution, unless . . . they shall have complied with certain conditions imposed by a majority . . . conditions which congress had no authority to impose. . . .

"The states are and must be equal in rights. . . . No . . . combination of states can impose conditions on a minority . . . without destroying that unity. . . .

"I am not a secessionist nor an exclusionist, but am opposed to both . . . and shall act with those who resent either. . . . [In 1868 Welles rejoined the Democratic party but four years later was a Liberal Republican. He speaks of proposed Constitutional amendments and of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, continuing]

". . . Had the states consented to abolish slavery in 1787 the three-fifths [representation apportionment] rule would never have been incorporated into the constitution. But slavery has been abolished not by the voluntary act of the states . . . but by the events of the war and it is now proposed by the exclusionists to deprive those states of their due representation according to population unless the blacks are enfranchised. . . .

". . . It is argued that there should be equality . . . irrespective of color. . . . When the constitution was framed the right of suffrage . . . was much more restricted than at present. . . . But gradually the basis has been enlarged by the states themselves without any interference by the federal government. . . .

"[He speaks of the proposed Constitutional amendment to secure reapportionment in the House—one man, one vote—and asks if] the rule of personal equality is the true test of representative government, how long will it be before this principle . . . will be made applicable to the senate? . . . New England has twelve Senators with a less population than New York which has but two. Connecticut . . . has the same voice . . . as New York. . . . Where is the equality? . . .

". . . The early schemes of the nullifiers and secessionists were not more revolutionary . . . than those which the exclusionists are now . . . pressing upon the country."

Welles, Gideon. Autograph manuscript, 14 octavo pages, with many author's corrections, untitled. $285.00

WELLES AUTOGRAPH LETTER

On a Charge of Abolitionism

We have an autograph letter written in 1847 at Washington by Gideon Welles when he was chief of the Bureau

of Provisions and Clothing for the Navy. The recipient was John Y. Mason of Virginia, then Secretary of the Navy and responsible for its operations in the Mexican War. Welles's letter is mainly concerned with a charge of Abolitionism against a "Mr. Pease," who is identified as Elisha M. Pease. Born in Connecticut, Pease had gone to Texas in 1835 just in time to take part in its war for independence from Mexico by fighting in the first skirmish and later by service in civil offices in the Republic. At the time of this letter he was in the Texas legislature. In 1853-57 he served as Governor of Texas, opposed secession (like Houston), and sat out the war, later becoming a Southern Unionist and Republican and holding various offices. Welles, who was *not* an Abolitionist, writes to Mason, the Virginian—marking his letter *Unofficial—private*:

> "I am . . . satisfied that injustice has been done to Mr. Pease in asserting that he is an abolitionist. He may not be, and I presume is not an advocate for slavery in the abstract, but is as . . . opposed to an interference with the constitutional rights of the slave states and to abolition views, as yourself. . . .
>
> "If I thought him an abolitionist, or . . . that he entertained views . . . offensive to you, I could not, after your courtesy . . . ask you to do violence to your feelings and position, by an act which would be repugnant to them. . . ."

Welles continues concerning a suggestion of "Mr. Pugh," who has been identified as senator from Ohio (1854) but at this time must have been serving in Mexico.

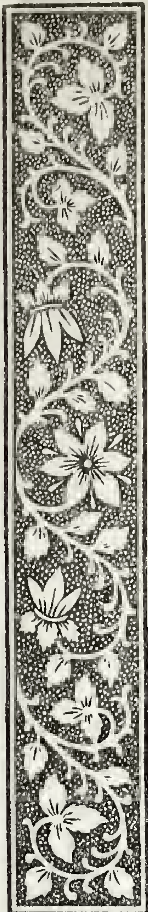
WELLES, GIDEON. A.L.S., Washington, July 1, 1847, two quarto pages, to Secretary of the Navy Mason. $145.00

15TH-CENTURY GIANT

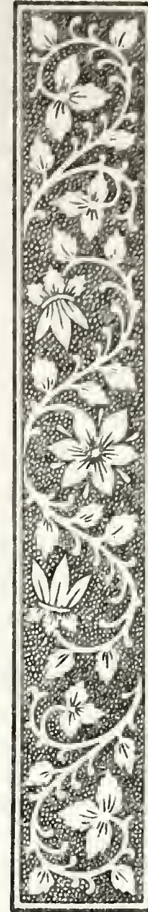
A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE WORLD

Back in the days when the *Liber Chronicarum* or "Nuremberg Chronicle," as it is known, was selling for little more than a tenth of what a fine copy fetches now, that great bookseller, the late Lathrop C. Harper, said, "If it were a rare book, it would be worth $10,000." Though it is nearing its 500th birthday the Chronicle is even now not rare in a strict bibliographical sense, mainly because it was big and sturdy enough to withstand the passage of centuries. Complete editions of small books have been used to pieces, but not this heavyweight, though many

AUTOGRAPHS &



RARE BOOKS FIRST EDITIONS AUTOGRAPHS AND MANUSCRIPTS



FIRST EDITIONS

PAUL C. RICHARDS—Autographs
High Acres *Templeton, Mass. 01468*
939-8981. *Area Code 617*

180. [LINCOLN, ABRAHAM]. Partly printed message from the Department of State sent to [Gideon Wellea], Secretary of the Navy, informing him that "the President desirea a meeting of the Heads of Departmenta at the Executive Manaion at 12 o'clock and that they will bring with them their suggeationa for the Mesaage." The portion supplied in manuscript is in the holograph of Frederick W. Seward, aon of the Secretary of State. Notices to attend Lincoln's cabinet meetinga are very seldom offered for sale. In this instance Lincoln wiahed to receive from hia cabinet membera their suggeationa for hia Annual Measage to Congreaa, due the following January. From the Wellea family papera, and never before offered for sale. Choice! 450.00

> Department of State
> Washington, Dec. 1st 1863
>
> Sir:
>
> The President desires a meeting of the Heads of Departments at the Executive Mansion at 12 o'clock and that they will bring with them their suggestions for the Message.
>
> To the Honorable
> Secretary of the Navy

181. BUNCHE, DR. RALPH J. American black diplomat; Under Secretary General of the United Nations; recipient of Nobel Peace Prize; recently honored on U.S. postage atamp. Brief Typed Letter Signed, as Under Secretary General, on imprinted United Nationa atationery. 1 page, 4to. New York, March 24, 1969. To B. T. Crowe agreeing to autograph resolutions of the General Assembly of November 2, 1956. Fine. 35.00

182. CHIANG KAI-SHEK. Chinese General and President. His bold signature, brushed Chinese characters, boldly applied on a 12mo slip imprinted "The President of the Republic of China" and alao bearing an embossed "sun" deaign. Fine example of a scarce world leader. 75.00

ELEVEN DAYS IN OFFICE, PRESIDENT TYLER SEEKS A BENDING OF THE RULES

183. TYLER, JOHN. President and Vice President. Highly interesting Autograph Letter Signed, aa President, written just eleven days after assuming the Presidency occasioned by the death of William Henry Harrison. 1 page, 4to. Washington, April 16, 1841. To Hon. [George] Badger, Secretary of the Navy. Integral addresa-leaf addressed by Tyler. Tyler writes: "I feel a deep interest that Mr. Douglas Murdough should recieve a Midshipman's warrant. I cannot urge you to violate any rule which you have established -- or to do any thing which would exceed the necessities of the service -- but may not exceptions be occassionally made? I submit however the whole matter to yourself with the fullest confidence...." Pristine condition, and a fine example of the new President seeking to use his power of office. With a handaome ateel-engraved portrait. 850.00

184. FROST, ROBERT. 1874-1963. American poet; recipient of four Pulitzer Prizea. Typed Manuscript Signed of his poem THE PASTURE. Two four-line stanzas (complete poem). 1/2 page, 8vo. No date. Typed inscription for Mary Young. With attractive printed 8vo portrait of the poet in middle age. Nice ensemble for framing or diaplay. 225.00

185. BRANDT, WILLY. German statesman and political leader following World War II; President of Germany; recipient of Nobel Peace Prize. His book: Draussen / Schriften Wahrend der Emigration. Text in German. Munich, 1966. Presentation inscription on the half-title page to the American historian William Shirer: "To William Shirer / with kind regards / Willy Brandt". Black cloth. Original imprinted dust-jacket. Fine and acarce! 95.00

186. SEWARD, WILLIAM H. Secretary of State (Lincoln & Johnson); Governor of New York; one of the founders of the Republican Party; purchased Alaska [Seward's Folly] from the Russians. Autograph Letter Signed, as U.S. Senator. Full page, 8vo. Washington, March 27, 1849. To William B. Preston, Secretary of the Navy, submitting the name of J. Davis Reed of Schenectady, who ia seeking a Midshipman's appointment. Seward hopes he will be appointed. Fine. 65.00

187. [BASEBALL] LANDIS, KENESAW MOUNTAIN. 1866-1944. American jurist, presiding at 1907 trial of Standard Oil of Indiana; Baseball Commissioner for American and National Leagues (1920-1944). Typed Letter Signed, aa Judge of the Northern District of Illinois, on imprinted atationery of that office. 1 page, 8vo. Chicago, May 26, 1919. To Julius Broehl, Pana, Illinois, declining an invitation. Fine example of an uncommon autograph. 65.00

188. ROXAS Y ACUNA, MANUEL. 1892-1948. First President of the Philippines following World War II; killed in a plane crash; Brigadier General during the War. Signed 8vo bust photograph showing the Philippine statesman in an inspiring pose. With a TLS from his private secretary, dated September 12, 1946, sending the photograph to an American collector. Quite scarce! 75.00

189. TRUMAN, BESS WALLACE. First Lady. Imprinted White House Card, boldly signed. Fine. 75.00

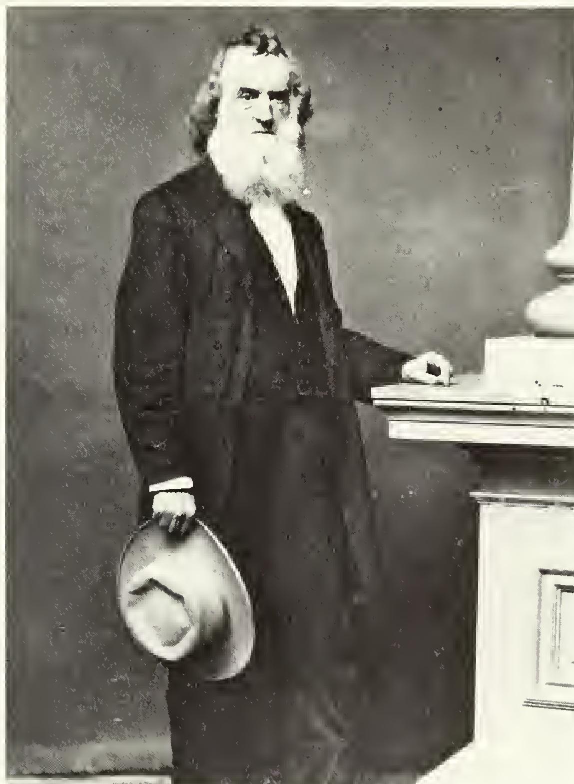
Lincoln Lore

September, 1974 — Bulletin of The Lincoln National Life Foundation...Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor. Published each month by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801. — Number 1639

John Niven on Gideon Welles
A Review

Politics makes strange bedfellows, and there are none stranger than President Abraham Lincoln and his Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles. Welles was not only a Democrat before he became a Republican, but more or less a Democrat of the Loco-Foco variety; "Locofoco" was Lincoln's Whiggish term of opprobrium for his Democratic opponents. An ardent expansionist, Welles urged Martin Van Buren to embrace the cause of Texas annexation in 1844; Lincoln made an early mark in national politics when, as a Congressman, he opposed the war with Mexico for Texas. George D. Prentice, whose editorials Lincoln admired, had been Welles's arch rival in Connecticut's political newspaper wars. Nevertheless, in 1861, the two men began a cooperative effort to win the war against the South and keep the Republican party in power.

John Niven's new biography, *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), will be described as the "definitive" work on the famous white-bearded Civil War diarist. Over 650-pages long, prodigiously researched, and smoothly written, the book deserves that description in many ways. Still, such a description does not quite capture the essence of Professor Niven's work. Despite the importance of Welles's position in President Lincoln's administration and the frequent use made of his diaries by many writers on the Civil War era, Welles has been a man more often referred to than studied, analyzed, and understood. His writings have been like a sign-post pointing the way to understanding the Lincoln administration; few have stopped to study the make-up of the sign itself. Therefore, one gets less the feeling of satisfaction associated with learning the definitive word than the feelings of surprise and curiosity stimulated by finding an important but previously hidden historical personality. Niven's book makes one want to get out materials on and by Welles and to study them rather than to shelve the Welles materials and say, "We know exactly where he fits in now."



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

FIGURE 1. Gideon Welles was born in Glastenbury, Connecticut in 1802. He attended the Episcopal Academy in Cheshire, Connecticut and Alden Partridge's military school in Norwich, Vermont. His father wanted him to become a lawyer, but Welles became a newspaper man, editing the *Hartford Times.* He served four terms in the Connecticut state legislature where he wrote America's first general incorporation law by which businessmen gained limited liability according to general rules established by law rather than through a special grant of monopoly privileges from the legislature. While serving as chief of the Navy's Bureau of Provisions and Clothing under Democrat James K. Polk, Welles gained valuable experience in administering naval affairs and also established valuable connections with Maine's Hannibal Hamlin. As Lincoln's vice-president, Hamlin was later entrusted with the choice of naval secretary for Lincoln's cabinet. Welles was a capable Secretary of the Navy, reading a staggering amount of the in-coming correspondence (perhaps one-third) and drafting replies in his own hand.

In Francis B. Carpenter's popular ideological painting of President Lincoln and his cabinet, the Secretary of the Navy occupies the true center of the painting (but not the focus of the painting, which is on Lincoln, of course [see *Lincoln Lore* Number 1623]). Carpenter rendered Welles's position in Lincoln's cabinet accurately, but Welles has suffered neglect while more colorful personalities to the left and right of him like Edwin Stanton and Montgomery Blair have been repeatedly etched in strong passages in many books and articles about Abraham Lincoln. Niven does not imply that Welles occupied the position of central importance in Lincoln's administrative family; on the contrary, he quite clearly shows that Welles was "not a member of the inner circle" of Lincoln's cabinet. Niven does show, however, that Welles was much less conservative and predictable and much closer to Lincoln's positions on many issues than historians previously thought.

Far from colorless, Welles had a radical streak in him. Niven argues that he "inherited" it from his father, a Jeffersonian Republican and religious skeptic from the high Federalist and staunchly Calvinist state of Connecticut. Welles became an early follower of Andrew Jackson and the father of the Democratic party in Connecticut. Uncharacteristically for a political organizer, Welles had some strong political opinions and definitely leaned towards the radical or Loco-Foco wing

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

FIGURE 2. John P. Hale was Gideon Welles's "nemesis," according to Professor Niven. New Hampshire's Senator Hale served as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, and he and the Secretary of the Navy feuded constantly over the awarding of naval contracts and Welles's unfortunate penchant for nepotism in the administration of naval affairs. Hale eventually supported Salmon P. Chase's bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 1864.

of the Democratic party.

Niven's book is more truly a biography than the subtitle suggests, for he spends a great deal of time on Welles's early career before he became Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy. He suffers, therefore, from the problems many biographers have: the man's life that they are studying generally spans a great period of time and therefore requires writing about eras of history that are not necessarily the writer's particular specialty. This makes the biographer rely less upon his own synthetic judgments than upon the most acceptable historical interpretations of others for the periods beyond his major area of interest. Professor Niven's first book was about Connecticut during the Civil War; his judgments about Welles's role in the era Niven knows most about seem independent and do not follow closely or slavishly any particular school of thought about the Civil War. When Niven writes about Welles as the early organizer of the Democracy in Connecticut, however, he follows rather closely the interpretation of party formation in this era laid down by Richard P. McCormick's book, *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966).

It is McCormick's contention that party formation during the Jacksonian era had little or nothing to do with economic interests or local issues, and the Democratic and Whig parties were not continuations of the Federalist and Jeffersonian Republican parties. Parties arose to battle for the presidency when there was no candidate with which the particular section of the country could identify as a sectional choice. In Connecticut, therefore, no Jackson partisans appeared until "they saw some prospect that Adams might lose the presidency." The Jacksonians did not contest local elections in Connecticut until they were sustained by the outside help of federal patronage available because of Jackson's victory in 1828. The two parties became much more evenly matched in 1832, when the Jacksonians made a much stronger showing. Henry Clay simply did not have the sectional identification in Connecticut that New England's own John Quincy Adams had had; therefore Jackson's men could make great gains. To perceive party formation in this way, of course, is to see politics as pure opportunism: parties formed when ambitious local organizers had a chance to win and therefore chanced their fortunes on one national personality or another.

Thus McCormick (and his case is important, for his book has influenced many others besides John Niven) argues that the Democratic and Whig parties "of the 1840's were 'artificial,' in that they seemingly existed in defiance of the real sectional antagonisms that were present at the time." He sees them as artificial, too, in the sense that their appeal to the voters had nothing to do with issues that affected the voters in any way. This is McCormick's description of American antebellum politics before the 1850's:

> The second American party system also brought into vogue a new campaign style. Its ingredients can scarcely be described with precision, but they included an emphasis on dramatic spectacles — such as the mass rally, the procession, and the employment of banners, emblems, songs, and theatrical devices — and on club-like associations, colorful personalities, and emotionally charged appeals to party loyalty. Politics in this era took on a dramatic function. It enabled voters throughout the nation to experience the thrill of participating in what amounted to a great democratic festival that seemed to perceptive foreign observers to be remarkably akin to the religious festivals of Catholic Europe.
>
> In their exciting election campaigns, the Americans of that generation found a satisfying form of cultural expression. Perhaps because there were so few emotional outlets available to them of equal effectiveness, they gave themselves up enthusiastically to the vast drama of the election contest. They eagerly assumed the identity of partisans, perhaps for much the same reason that their descendants were to become Dodger fans, Shriners, or rock-and-roll addicts. In this guise, at least, campaigns had little to do with government or public policy, or even with the choice of officials. For the party leaders, of course, the purpose of the campaign was to stimulate the faithful and, if possible, convert the wayward in order to produce victory at the polls.

Professor Niven adds an element to McCormick's picture of the origins of the second American party system. He suggests that Welles and other early party organizers copied the "dramatic" techniques that McCormick described in the above passage from the great religious revivals that swept America in the 1820's and 1830's. This was opportunism indeed on Welles's part, for that cool occasional Episcopalian and Jeffersonian skeptic certainly had no truck with the pietistic fervor and enthusiasm of the Second Great Awakening. Even with this addition to McCormick's scheme, Niven's overall characterization of Welles's role in organizing the Democracy in Connecticut is recognizable as nearly pure McCormick:

> Writing . . . , when revivalist techniques had been rather completely borrowed and secularized in politics, Michel Chevalier [a foreign observer of the American scene] was astonished at the ritualistic tone of party contests. His vivid descriptions of Democratic parades clearly establish their evangelical character. He was struck by their resemblance to religious processions he had seen in Mexico and in Europe — the torches, the mottoes, the transparencies, "the halting places" — all the symbolic trappings and varieties of quasi-mystical experience. Tocqueville, who visited the United States three years earlier, had generalized in a similar vein: "Every religious doctrine," he wrote in one of his pocket notebooks, ["] has a political doctrine which by affinity is attached to it." Gideon Welles would have cheerfully applied such a notion to New England Federalism, while rejecting its application to Jacksonian Democracy. Yet he did not scruple to employ both the form and substance of the second Great Awakening in his political and editorial work. He owed more to the itinerant evangelists than he knew, or would have cared to admit.

To borrow McCormick's thesis, however, causes special problems for a biographer who is sympathetic towards his subject: how does one make Welles look good when he is the opportunistic manipulator of an "artificial" system of essentially cosmetic politics? It is fair to say that Niven is sympathetic towards Gideon Welles, although he is not uncritical. Niven rather skillfully shows both sides of Welles's struggle with Samuel F. DuPont over the effectiveness of monitors and later, for example, he is downright censorious of Welles's conservative defense of Andrew Johnson's do-nothing Reconstruction policies after the Civil War. Earlier in the book, however, Niven is wont to argue that Welles was a pro-

fessional politician, yes, but one who cared more sincerely about the issues than his average peers. McCormick's thesis, then, is at odds with the biographer's natural defensiveness about his subject.

Certainly Welles was an adept practitioner of the political arts, and Niven is not afraid to admit it. Allegedly a principled Jacksonian opponent of banks, Welles signed the "memorial praying for the incorporation of the Farmers and Mechanics Bank of Hartford," which would be a "pet" bank to receive from the Democratic administration in Washington some of the federal government's funds as deposits. When members of an opposing faction of Welles's party managed to gain a nomination to run for Congress for one of their members, Welles supported him in his newspaper but published anonymous letters attacking the candidate in his paper too (page 114). Though he had himself been sympathetic with the workingmen's movement in the Democratic party, he attacked some factional enemies as atheistic radicals for having once supported the same movement. (pages 140-141). By 1846, Welles was beginning to have serious ideological differences with the Democratic administration of James K. Polk, which he thought had sold out the Northern Democracy for the slave power's interest in Texas and low tariffs. Yet Welles had urged Van Buren to climb aboard the Texas bandwagon to gain the Democratic nomination in 1844, and he held on to his patronage job in the Navy Department's Bureau of Provisions and Clothing even while he tried to undermine the administration that appointed him (pages 224-225). Clearly, Welles's dismay with the Democratic party was less a matter of sincere concern about the slavery or even the slavery-expansion issue than it was a matter of fear and anger that Northerners were being pushed out of the jobs wielded by the Democratic party when it ruled Washington. Welles also supported Isaac Toucey, his long-term factional enemy in the Connecticut Democracy, in his bid for appointment as Attorney General in Polk's cabinet, not because Toucey was a qualified applicant, but because Welles wanted to get him out of the state (page 235).

Nevertheless, Niven calls Welles a "democratic idealist," and he has some persuasive evidence. After all, the effect of office-holding on some politicians is to make them mindless defenders of the administration that employs them. Welles's course of action towards the Polk administration may have been "devious," a word Niven uses to describe it, but he probably would also have been accused of deviousness had he defended an administration he did not really believe in. In many ways, Welles was truly and idealistically democratic. When the anti-masonic fervor struck Connecticut, for example, Welles, himself a Mason, suggested that the Masons ought to dissolve their order out of respect for public opinion.

The problem here is serious, and it is a general one for the historical discipline. If every biographer followed Niven's course, adopting the latest interpretation of the period but noting the exception represented by his own subject's life, then the historian would be faced with interpretations that described movements as a whole but failed to describe accurately the course of any single man. Professor Niven might have demonstrated a bit more independence in his judgments about this phase of Welles's life.

Niven could have done so, had he been more willing to describe and analyze Gideon Welles's political ideas. If there is any consistent failing in Niven's otherwise artful and solid book, it is his reluctance to give the reader much intellectual biography. One learns a great deal about what Welles thought of men, but what he thought of measures often remains infuriatingly vague. There is very little, for example, about Welles's reading, and very probably he did not read very much. However, one does learn to one's astonishment that in a cabinet meeting to discuss Andrew Johnson and the Tenure of Office Act, Welles was the only member who knew that Daniel Webster had given a speech on removals from office. There is doubtless plenty of material for at least a skinny little chapter on Welles's ideology, if not his reading, for he was a newspaper editor and wrote hundreds of editorials. Yet nowhere in the book is there much effort to stitch together the ideas that lie in Welles's writings. The result is that one hears from Professor Niven that Welles was a more principled idealist than many wire-pullers, but one has trouble putting one's finger on the principles and ideals.

It is not the case that Professor Niven is incapable of such an analysis, for on occasion he makes very acute analyses of speeches and ideas. Take, for example, William Seward's 1858 "irrepressible conflict" speech. The common wisdom on this speech is that the phrase "irrepressible conflict" was catchy and led to the easy stereotype that Seward was too radical on the slavery question. Seward's biographer, Glyndon Van Deusen, urges this point and otherwise describes the speech as an attack on the Democratic party for having "become a sectional and local party" (Van Deusen's words). Niven agrees with Van Deusen but adds a perceptive point quite at odds with Van Deusen's characterization but fully as explanatory of the speech's tendency to hurt Seward's chance for the Republican nomination in 1860:

> Beyond the words themselves, the tenor of the Rochester speech shook the precarious unity of the Republican party. Seward spoke as a Whig, not as a Republican, and he recklessly and falsely charged that Democrats had always been proslavery. Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and James K. Polk had all been all [*sic*] slaveholders; Martin Van Buren had appeased the slave power in his first inaugural. Slavery, Seward implied, had been a source of political division between the Whigs and the Democrats, with the Democrats always upholding the institution.

Thus the problem with Seward was his Whiggishness rather than his radicalism on the slavery question. He did not say that the Democratic party had *become* a tool of slavery but that it *always had been.*

Niven holds that, just as Welles became a Democrat of

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

FIGURE 3. David G. Farragut was a Southerner chosen largely by virtue of his seniority to head the naval expedition to capture New Orleans. Farragut was nearsighted but did not wear glasses, was sixty years old, and had been passed over for other commands before. Yet in 1863, Lincoln told Welles that "there had not been, take it all in all, so good an appointment in either branch of the service as Farragut."

somewhat radical or Loco-Foco leanings, when he changed parties he became the leader of Connecticut's "more radical" Republicans. This may be true, but it is clear from Niven's book (and he does not attempt to cloak it) that Welles was basically a free soiler who feared Southern power in Washington and the "Africanization" of the territories. Along with this went a strong civil-libertarian strain of outrage at the Fugitive Slave Law. The meaning of radicalism in this context is somewhat unclear, and it would have been more instructive had Niven gone into the varieties of Connecticut Republicanism. A group of conservative heirs of the Connecticut Federalism that Welles despised in fact showed a more "radical" interest in the welfare of the black man. Theodore Dwight Woolsey, the President of Yale, and Leonard Bacon, a New Haven Congregational minister, for example, tended to be very conservative on many political questions like universal suffrage but showed a sincere life-long interest in the black man. As early as 1825, Woolsey and Bacon, according to George A. King's *Theodore Dwight Woolsey: His Political and Social Ideas* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1956), established an Antislavery Association to improve the condition of New Haven's free Negro population and to stir interest among Connecticut's whites and religious seminarians throughout the country. In 1881, Woolsey was in his eighties and serving as a trustee of the Slater Fund, a charitable organization aimed at educating the South's blacks. Welles, by contrast, had opposed Prudence Crandall's attempt to establish a school for out-of-state black girls in Canterbury, Connecticut in 1831 and was rigidly insensitive even to the needs of blacks for protection from bodily harm in New Orleans and Memphis thirty-five years later.

Nevertheless, it is true (and not a little surprising to those who might think that Welles was always as conservative as he was during Reconstruction) that the biggest stumbling block to Welles's selection as Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy was his known radicalism on the Fugitive Slave Law. Lincoln extracted a promise from Welles to obey that law as a condition of membership in the cabinet. Then (this too is a little surprising but better known) Welles did not really live up to his promise. Long before the Army did it, the Navy, on Welles's explicit instructions, sheltered fugitive slaves who sought protection on naval vessels, employed them for wages on shipboard and in the yard, and signed them on at ten dollars a month as the equivalent of army privates for naval service. When Lincoln protested such practices by the Army, he let Welles's flagrant actions go without a reprimand, probably as a signal of his true intentions in regard to slavery as soon as he was assured of the loyalty of the border states.

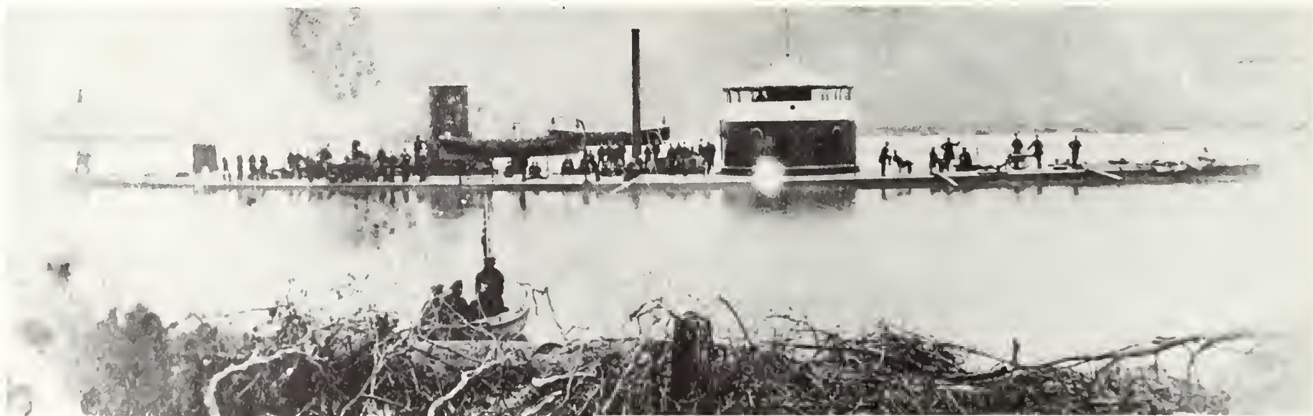
Niven is on very sure ground when he talks of Welles's years on Lincoln's cabinet and the insights here are fascinating and Niven's judgments independent. The administrative and political workings of the Lincoln administration from its early confused fumbling with secession to its surer prosecution of the war are described in some considerable detail and with freshness.

In regard to the Emancipation Proclamation, for example, Niven argues that the President asked William Seward and Gideon Welles about the possibility first because he knew where the others in his cabinet would stand. Seward and Welles thus occupied the critical center of the spectrum of political opinion in the cabinet (proof again that painter Francis Carpenter was right). When Lincoln showed his draft of the proclamation to the full cabinet on July 22, 1862, it startled *every member.* "The measure goes beyond anything I have recommended," said Edwin Stanton. Lincoln was supported only by Bates, usually considered as the most conservative member of the cabinet. Seward, interestingly enough, opposed it on the grounds that its issuance would bring foreign intervention to prevent abolition for the sake of their cotton supplies.

Niven's little description of this oft-described event challenges many commonly accepted beliefs about the Emancipation Proclamation. It makes highly suspect assertions that the Proclamation had the moral grandeur of a bill of lading and that Congress had already done nearly as much in its Confiscation Acts. It also calls into question the old saw that Lincoln was anxious to get the Proclamation out in order to dissuade England from intervention. Seward knew, what some cynical diplomatic historians since have known, that the classes who controlled British government decisions did not care a fig about America's being inconsistent about freedom and democracy.

Hopefully, these few incidents give something of the flavor of Niven's rich book. It deserves its place on the shelf next to Benjamin Thomas and Harold Hyman's distinguished biography of Edwin Stanton. Unfortunately, Professor Niven has been poorly served by his publishers, the prestigious Oxford University Press. The footnotes are at the back of the book, some 580 pages away from the reader who starts on page one. The index is downright puny; it is mostly only an index to proper names, and many of these (Prudence Crandall, for example) do not make the index. The book is also marred by an astonishing number of typographical errors. "Camaraderie" becomes "camaderie." John *P.* Usher becomes John *B.* Usher. What should be a comma on page 532 is a period. Fitz-John Porter becomes Fritz-John Porter. They coin the word "inciteful" on page 394. Mr. Stimers becomes Mr. Stimer in the very next line. Parentheses and quotation marks sometimes fail to open. On page 186, the word "arrangements" stands where one strongly suspects that Professor Niven wrote "arguments" in the original.

Fortunately, Professor Niven's meaning shines through the unappetizing format of the book, and students of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, and Connecticut politics are much the richer for it.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

FIGURE 4. The United States Monitor Mahopoc. Welles was slower than his Confederate counterpart, Stephen R. Mallory, to recognize the potential of ironclad vessels.

Lincoln Lore

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

October, 1979

Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor. Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801.

Number 1700

THE LAST LIFE PORTRAIT OF LINCOLN

While Boston authorities were attempting last spring to embargo the removal of Gilbert Stuart's famous paintings of George and Martha Washington, the last portrait of Lincoln painted from life quietly left Boston for Fort Wayne. The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum—thanks to a special appropriation from its governing body, the Lincoln National Life Foundation, Inc.—now houses Matthew Wilson's portrait of Lincoln painted from life and dated April, 1865, the month of the President's assassination. Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy, commissioned the portrait, and important contemporary witnesses testified to the remarkable quality of the likeness.

Matthew Henry Wilson was born in England in 1814. When he was seventeen, he emigrated to America to engage in the business of silk manufacture, only to find upon his arrival that no such industry existed in the United States. Hard times followed, as Wilson tried to make ends meet by tuning pianos and teaching school. His first portrait was a painted sketch of himself he made to send to his mother. The residents of his boarding house were so taken with the likeness that he decided to try painting portraits for a living. His first sitter paid him $2.00 for his portrait.

Wilson studied with Philadelphia painter Henry Inman from 1832 to 1835 and then went to Paris to study with Edouard Dubufe. He returned to America two years later and painted in Brooklyn, New Orleans, Baltimore, and other places before settling in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1856. He worked in the Boston-Hartford area and met Welles, a Hartford resident, in 1859. He painted portraits of the Welles family and of numerous members of the Connecticut commercial elite. Patrons now paid $100 for a Wilson portrait. By the end of the Civil War, Wilson charged $150 for a portrait.

On February 4, 1865, Mrs. Welles introduced Wilson to the President, apparently in order to make arrangements to paint his portrait. The next day, he met Lincoln at Alexander Gardner's photographic studio to have photographs made on which to base the portrait. The famous group of photographs that resulted from this last photographic sitting included the only Lincoln photographs with a hint of a smile on his face. After a day passed, probably spent waiting for Gardner's gallery to develop the photographs, Wilson started painting Lincoln's portrait. He painted all day on the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th.

Wilson worked on the Lincoln painting on the 14th and 15th, and then he tried to see the President in order to put on the finishing touches. A Cabinet meeting prevented him from doing so on the 17th, but he saw Lincoln the next day. On the 20th, he returned to the White House and painted there.

Wilson finished the portrait by February 22, 1865. As Francis B. Carpenter, another artist fortunate enough to have Lincoln sit for him, records it, on that day Lincoln was in a good mood:

> Temporarily upon the wall of the room [Lincoln's office] was a portrait of himself recently painted for Secretary Welles by a Connecticut artist friend. Turning to the picture, Mr. Welles remarked that he thought it a successful likeness. "Yes," returned the President, hesitatingly; and then came a story of a western friend whose wife pronounced her husband's portrait, painted secretly for a birthday present,

From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. Matthew Wilson's portrait of Lincoln is an oil painting on oval artist's board, 16 7/8" x 13 7/8". The frame, apparently the original, measures 27 5/8" x 24 1/2". It is in excellent condition.

"horridly like;" "and that," said he, "seems to me a just criticism of *this*!"

Lincoln was notoriously modest about his physical appearance. Welles was pleased with the portrait. He must have been pleased with the price, too. Wilson charged him only $85. Welles wrote the artist a check for that amount on April 12th.

Wilson had no way of knowing it, but he painted the President's likeness at the last possible moment. Three days after the check was written, the President was dead. Immediately, Louis Prang of Boston, a lithographer, wanted a copy of the portrait on which to base a print portrait. On April 20th, Wilson began painting a copy for Prang. Before the year was over, Wilson painted at least three copies, perhaps four or five.

The demand for copies shows that the portrait was successful. And the names of those who asked for copies provide even firmer proof that this was not just another portrait from life but also an excellent likeness. Wilson painted one copy for Welles, who wanted a copy to hang permanently in the Navy Department. He made a copy for Joshua Speed, Lincoln's most intimate friend in the days of his early manhood. Wilson provided still another copy for John Forney, a prominent Republican newspaperman in Philadelphia and Washington and a close political associate of Lincoln's during the Civil War. He may have made another copy for Mrs. Welles, who wanted one for a New Year's Day party in 1866.

Sorting out the subsequent history of the various portraits is no easy business. Maury Bromsen, the prominent dealer and collector from whom the Lincoln Library and Museum procured the painting, worked for years to establish the history of this portrait. Although some questions remain unanswered, it is clear that the copy hanging in the J.B. Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, is the copy made for Joshua Speed. Likewise, the Navy Department still retains the copy Welles had made for that purpose. One other copy of the painting is known; it hangs in Philipse Manor Hall in Yonkers, New York.

Both the Philipse Manor Hall copy and the copy in the Lincoln Library and Museum are signed, the former in red, the latter in black. The other two copies are unsigned and are *known* to be copies of the original. How can one be sure the Lincoln Library and Museum portrait is the original painting? First, it is the only version of the portrait which is dated. The date is April, 1865, and Wilson completed the original portrait in that month (note the date of Gideon Welles's check). Wilson began painting the copy for Prang late in April. He was apparently still painting it in May, for his diary states that he worked on the copy steadily from April 20th through May 2nd. On May 16th, Wilson noted that he was painting *two* copies of the Lincoln. This is the first mention of another copy and is proof that the May 2nd entry, "Painted on Mr. Lincoln," still refers to the Prang copy. Wilson finished no *copy* in April.

A complicating factor in tracing the history of the painting is that Charles Henry Hart, an enterprising Lincoln collector and sometime art dealer, owned two versions himself. In a 1911 newspaper article boasting of the quality of the version he owned at that time, Hart said that Wilson signed it in red to distinguish it as the original and best version. This, then, is the Philipse Manor Hall portrait, but it is not the original. Alice Brainerd Welles sold the Welles family's portrait to Hart in 1915. She sent a letter with it saying that the portrait she was selling had belonged to her grandfather, Gideon Welles; to her father, Edgar T. Welles; and then to her by inheritance in 1914. Hart owned the original portrait, but it was the second one he acquired. The first, of which he boasted so much, was a copy—not the original, not the only signed copy, and not so designated by the artist in any way.

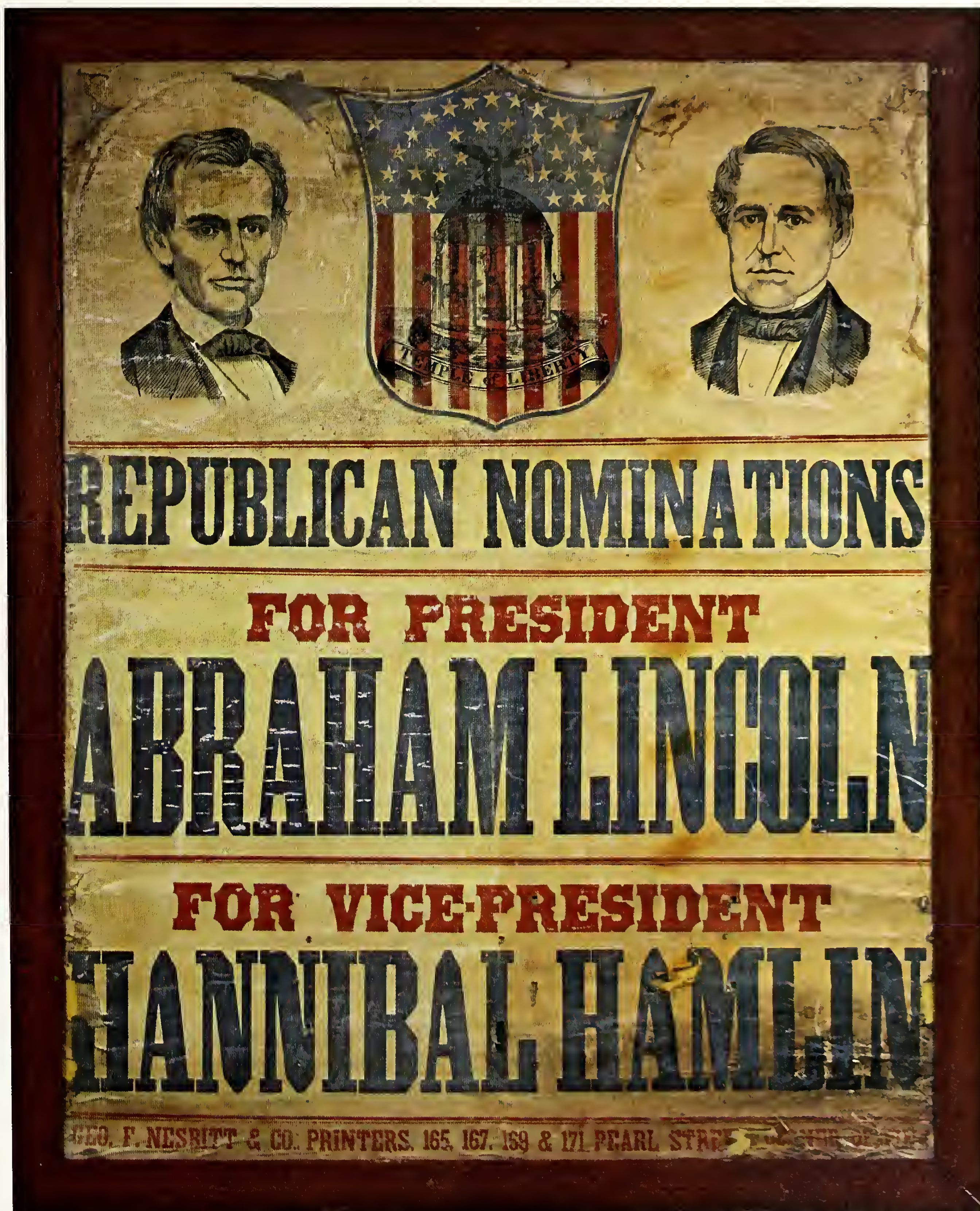
A further distinguishing feature of the recently acquired portrait is the fact that it is an oil on board. The other three extant copies are painted on canvas.

The staff of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum is grateful to the Lincoln National Life Foundation, Inc., which immediately upon hearing that this important portrait was available provided generous funding. The staff is grateful too for Mr. Bromsen's making the painting available and supplying copies of all his correspondence and research notes on the painting. Finally, it is grateful to Matthew Wilson, who captured the spirit of Lincoln's last days as no other artist ever has. One can see the hint of merriment in Lincoln's face, the first sign that the great burden of the war was, with Grant's victories, growing ever lighter.

From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 2. Famed for chromolithography, L. Prang & Co., Boston, Massachusetts, based this lithograph of Lincoln on Wilson's painting. Surely, no one commenced work on a new picture of the assassinated President more quickly than Prang.

OTHER RECENT ACQUISITIONS



From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 3. Political banners of the 1860s are rare, and banners from the 1860 campaign are apparently even scarcer than those from 1864. Doubtless frugal wives turned many a political banner into rags. Last year the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum added the first two examples of cloth political banners to its collection.

FIGURE 4. In 1964, R. Gerald McMurtry described the Manny reaper in the June issue of *Lincoln Lore*. He had recently helped collector Philip D. Sang obtain a manufacturer's model of this famous reaper, which was a competitor in the market and in the courtroom with the McCormick reaper. Mr. Sang's widow remembered Dr. McMurtry's good offices and recently allowed the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum to acquire the model. For the first time in history, this beautiful model (in perfect working order) is on public display.

From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 5. Like most other producers of campaign portraits for the 1860 election, Currier & Ives favored the portrait of Lincoln taken by Mathew Brady on February 27, 1860, while Lincoln was in New York City to make his famed Cooper Institute Address. As a statesmanlike photograph, it had not been exceeded by any likeness made by the time of the Republican nomination. Since Brady made the photograph, it was readily available to lithographers and engravers in the East.

Currier & Ives also obtained a copy of an earlier Lincoln photograph, probably taken by Roderick M. Cole in Peoria in 1858. The Republican candidate appeared considerably gaunter and generally less distinguished in this Western portrait. Nevertheless, Currier & Ives based "Our Next President" on it as well as "The Republican Banner for 1860," a campaign lithograph which showed both Lincoln and Hamlin. The portrait was widely used for tintypes, ferrotypes, and other campaign ephemera, but the Currier & Ives print is rather rare. The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum acquired a copy of "Our Next President" only this year.

From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

Lincoln Lore

Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor. Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801.

April, 1980

Number 1706

BROWNING'S PECULIAR TURN TO THE RIGHT

Those who keep diaries often influence the writing of history far more than they influenced events in their own day. Gideon Welles occupied a position in Lincoln's Cabinet inferior to William H. Seward's and Edwin M. Stanton's, but his sourly independent diary wrecked the reputations of dozens of Washington politicians. One reason the Radical Republicans have fared so poorly in historical writing is that most of the prominent diarists around Lincoln hated them. Welles, John Hay, and Edward Bates saw them as "Jacobins," but there is little evidence that the President saw the Radicals the same way. Salmon P. Chase, whose diary might have balanced the picture over the years, never had the influence on historical writing that the conservatives had, because he did not as clearly admire Lincoln as they did. Criticizing Abraham Lincoln has never been a good way to gain the trust of historians.

The other great diarist near the Lincoln administration, Orville Hickman Browning, was also a Radical-hater. His erratic and ultimately inexplicable political course during the Civil War reveals the danger in relying too heavily on diaries, which may reflect peculiar political positions.

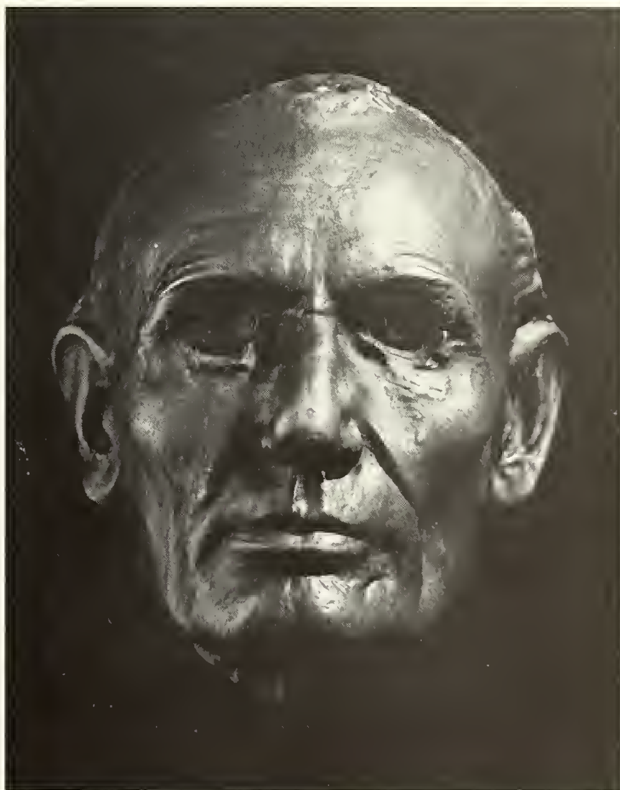
Browning was never much of a "Lincoln man." He had hoped that Edward Bates would be the Republican nominee for President in 1860. However, the Illinois delegation, of which Browning was a member, was pledged to Lincoln, and Browning worked for Lincoln's nomination at the convention. Even after the nomination, Browning thought that "we have made a mistake in the selection of candidates." His assistance in getting Bates to support the Republican ticket proved vital, but Browning had little luck in recommending Cabinet appointments. He wanted to see Bates become Secretary of State and Joseph Holt, Secretary of War. Browning's was one of many voices raised against Norman B. Judd's inclusion in Lincoln's official family.

Browning exercised his greatest influence on the Lincoln administration when he read a draft of the First Inaugural Address and suggested removing a provocative threat to "reclaim the public property and places which have fallen" in the seceded states. Browning's reasoning has often been taken as Lincoln's. He admitted that Lincoln's draft was right in principle without altering the threat to "reclaim" federal property, but, Browning explained,

> In any conflict which may ensue between the government and the seceding States, it is very important that the traitors shall be the aggressors, and that they are kept constantly and palpably in the wrong.
>
> The first attempt that is made to furnish supplies or reinforcements to Sumter will induce aggression by South Carolina, and then the government will stand justified, before the entire country, in repelling that aggression, and retaking the forts.

After Fort Sumter fell, Browning imputed his own reasoning to Lincoln. "Upon looking into the laws," he told the President on April 18, "which clothe you with power to act in this emergency, I am not sure that you expected, or desired any other result."

Browning was a conservative by nature, but war brought out a radical streak in him. If Baltimore stood in the way of troops coming to protect Washington, he told Lincoln, it should be "laid in ruin." Before April was over, he thought it likely that slaves would flock to the Union armies and inevitably "rise in rebellion." "The time is not yet," he added, "but it will come when it will be necessary for you to march an army into the South, and proclaim freedom to the slaves." Browning celebrated General John C. Frémont's proclamation freeing the slaves of rebels in Missouri in the late summer of 1861, and he thought the President wrong to revoke it. Frémont's proclamation did "not deal with citizens at all," Browning remonstrated, "but with public enemies." Citing precedents in international law, he insisted that war abolished society and



From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. Browning recalled that sculptor Leonard W. Volk had worked in a marble yard in Quincy, Illinois, Browning's home. Lincoln's friend thought Volk's bust of Stephen A. Douglas "decidedly a work of genius." Volk is better known for his famous life mask of Lincoln. Dr. O. Gerald Trigg allowed the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum to photograph his superb bronze casting of the mask with the striking result above. For more information on the mask and on Volk's famous castings of Lincoln's hands, turn to the second article in this issue of *Lincoln Lore*.

gave "liberty to use violence *in infinitum.*" "All their property," Browning said, "is subject to be . . . confiscated, and disposed of absolutely and forever by the belligerent power, without any reference whatever to the laws of society." Lincoln disagreed sharply.

After the death of Senator Stephen A. Douglas in June of 1861, Governor Richard Yates appointed Browning to finish his term. In the Senate, Browning defended the administration's arbitrary arrests and voted for the First Confiscation Act. He voted to emancipate slaves in the District of Columbia.

After April of 1862, Browning turned suddenly to the right. He opposed the Second Confiscation Act and urged Lincoln to veto it. It was a test "whether he [Lincoln] was to control the abolitionists and Radicals or whether they were to control him." He praised Lincoln's letter in answer to Horace Greeley's "Prayer of Twenty Millions" for emancipation, and he bitterly opposed the Emancipation Proclamation that fall. Browning was campaigning for Congressional candidates in Illinois when he heard it had been issued, and he practically stopped in his tracks. He slowed down his campaigning, and he twice pleaded with Lincoln to alter the Proclamation.

There is no explanation for the suddenness of Browning's change. In principle the Emancipation Proclamation was little different from Frémont's proclamation, and Browning had quarreled with Lincoln for revoking that. Lincoln's assault on slavery seemed to be legitimate by the very precedents in international law which Browning had called to Lincoln's attention. The Illinois Senator was disappointed that the President had not appointed him to the United States Supreme Court. He wanted the job so badly that he wrote Lincoln a somewhat embarrassed letter asking for it outright, admitting that it was "an office peculiarly adapted to my tastes." By the spring of 1862, Lincoln still had not filled the position, and many thought Browning was still in the running. Lincoln did not decide to appoint David Davis until July, and Browning had already turned to the right by that time.

Politically, Browning became increasingly disaffected from the administration. There was much doubt by 1864 that he would support Lincoln's reelection. Browning told a friend in September that he had "never . . . been able to persuade myself that he [Lincoln] was big enough for his position." No one knows how he voted in November. Browning's Civil War politics are an enigma to this day.

From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 2. Orville Hickman Browning remained personally friendly to Lincoln even after their political disagreements. Gustave Koerner, a fellow Illinois Republican, always remembered Browning's "conspicuous . . . ruffled shirt and large cuffs." Their relations were pleasant enough, but Koerner would "have liked him better if he had been a little less conscious of his own superiority."

FIGURE 3. Lincoln's first inauguration.

From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

April 11, 1980

Dear Mr. Neely:

Please find enclosed:
1. Gideon Welles' Riggs bank check for painting of Abraham Lincoln.
2. Retained copy of letter of transmittal from Alice Welles to Charles Henry Hart.
3. Clipping from New York Sun.
4. Signed carte-de-visite of artist Matthew Wilson.

Sincerely,

Thomas Welles Brainard

Thomas Welles Brainard
Melody Farms
South Street
South Coventry, CT. 06238

WASHINGTON, D.C. 12 April 1865

Riggs & Co.

Pay to Matthew Willson or Order ~~or bearer~~

Eighty five Dollars

$

Gideon Welles

Lith by HATCH & Co. 20 William St N.Y.

Matthew Wilson

New York City December 3,1915

Dear Mr.Hart;-

This portrait of President Lincoln that I deliver to you herewith was painted from life by Matthew Wilson,in Washington,D.C. two weeks before the assassination,for my grandfather Hon Gideon Welles,Secretary of the Navy during the whole of Mr.Lincoln's administration and was very highly prized by my grandfather as an excellent likeness of his friend the President,so much did my grandfather esteem it,that after Mr.Lincoln's death he had Mr.Wilson paint a replica of it for the Navy Department where it now hangs.From my grandfather it passed to his only son,my father,the late Edgar T.Welles,of this city,who died in August of last year when it was inherited by me and it has not ever been out of our family's possession.

I am very truly yours

Matthew Wilson's Portrait of Lincoln.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SUN—*Sir:* I do not know that it makes much difference, but it is just as well to state matters accurately; and referring to the statement in THE SUN this morning the facts are:

My father obtained a sitting of Mr. Lincoln for a portrait to be painted by Mr. Matthew Wilson, who had established a studio in Washington somewhat under my father's auspices.

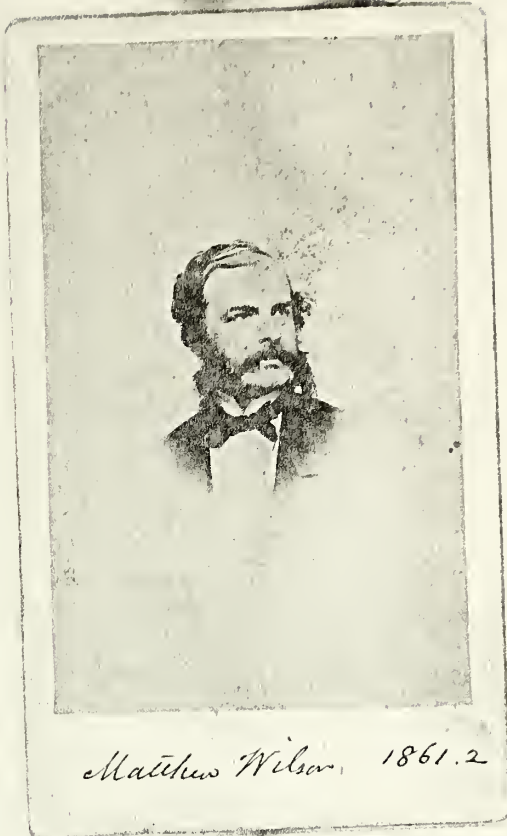
That portrait is now in my possession and has never been out of the family.

After Mr. Lincoln's death Mr. Joshua Speed, who was Mr. Lincoln's most intimate friend, visited Washington and desiring a good picture of Mr. Lincoln selected this as the best likeness. My father allowed Mr. Wilson to make a copy for Mr. Speed and subsequently one for the Department.

It represents Mr. Lincoln with a pleasant expression, as was the case with all of Mr. Wilson's portraits. He painted portraits of all, I believe, of our family.

EDGAR T. WELLES.

NEW YORK, February 22.


Matthew Wilson 1861.2

Lincoln Lore

April, 1981

Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor.
Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the
Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801.

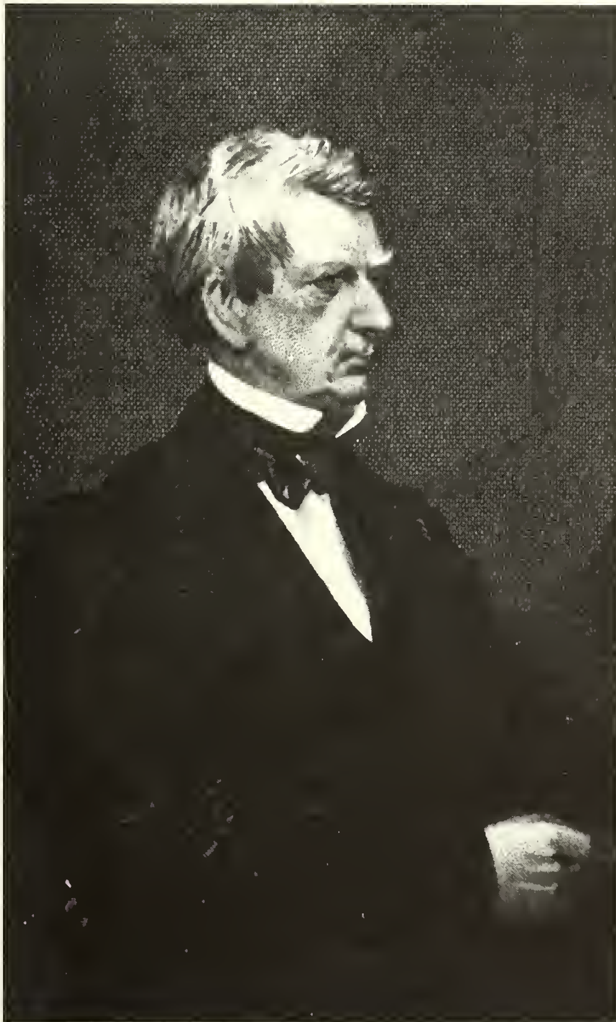
Number 1718

NEW LIGHT ON THE SEWARD-WELLES-LINCOLN CONTROVERSY?

Charles Francis Adams delivered a eulogy on William H. Seward in April, 1873, about six months after Seward's death. Isolated from day-to-day political developments during the Civil War by his residence in England and indebted to Secretary of State Seward for his appointment as Ambassador to England, Adams thought that Seward had been the mastermind of the Lincoln administration. His eulogy on Seward made that point clear. It also rankled Gideon Welles.

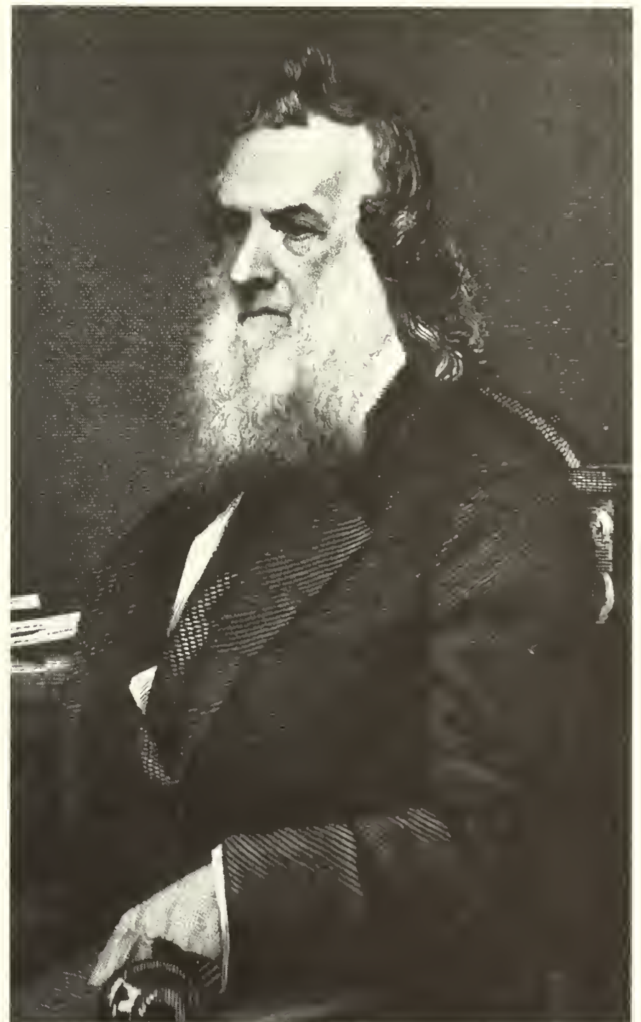
As Secretary of the Navy during the Lincoln administration, Welles undeniably occupied a better seat to observe the inner workings of the Lincoln administration. He had never liked Seward, and he possessed considerable talents as a polemical writer and delineator of acid portraits. Welles's rebuttal to Adams's eulogy appeared in a book, *Lincoln and Seward,* published in 1874. Welles, as his able biographer John Niven put it, "was the first promoter of the Lincoln legend." Seward's stock went down, never to rise above Lincoln's again.

Welles's book struck a responsive chord in George B. Lincoln, an obscure New York politician who had been Brooklyn's postmaster during the Civil War. After reading the book, he wrote a



From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. William H. Seward.



From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 2. Gideon Welles.

long letter to its author. The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum acquired the letter this year, and it is published here for the first time.

Rivervale Bergin Co N.J. April 25th 1874
Hon Gideon Welles
My dear Sir

A thoughtful friend recently sent me a copy of the book called *"Lincoln & Seward"*. Having thanked him for sending it. I perform now the pleasant duty—of thanking *you* for writing it—I read these articles as they appeared in the *Galaxy* and then promised myself to write & thank you for the timely service you were rendering to our country in correcting at once the false impression that the address of *Mr Adams* was giving of the relative status in public affairs of *Pres. Lincoln* and his *Sec Mr Seward.*

Mr Lincoln was my personal friend long before he came to Washington in 1861. I think I remember telling you once of the style of apartments they gave *Mr Lincoln* at the Astor House in *March 1860.* and my complaint thereat—and telling the office boys there that the time would come when they would not offer him such a room as *No 17*!—telling them that he was to be the next President of the United States—at which they laughed immediately—asking me if I was *Crazy*! I refer to this, as I recollect the remark you made to me the first time we met after the inauguration when you said—"The Astor House people found a different set of apartments for *Mr Lincoln* when he came on this time from those they gave him a few years ago—did they not?"

Pardon me if I devote a little time this stormy night to giving you a few of my early impressions & remnicences of my good namesake. Had my name been *Smith* or *Jones* I would have known but little of *Lincoln,* about as much as the average of *Smith* & *Jones* family did previous to *1860.* But my name was *Lincoln*—and my business interests brought me in continual contact with those who knew my namesake well and regarded him much—and my name would perpetually suggest some anacdote or fact relating to *Abraham* which being repeated—became after awhile to convince me that if the reputation of a man who stood so strong at *home* could be made *national*—nothing could withstand it in a competing political canvas.

In these articles before me you refer to the presentation of *Mr Lincolns* name at *Phil*[a] in *1856* for the place of *Vice President*—a matter that few remembered in *1860.*

But when I read the account of the doings of that convention I said to myself—"That one hundred & ten votes if properly utilised will defeat *Seward* and nominate *Lincoln*.["] Within thirty days thereafter I stated my belief to my intimate personal friends among whom I remember my then brilliant young friend *Theodore Tilton.* For the two years and more that followed I lost no opportunity when among those active in public affairs to declare my belief that *Lincoln* was the coming man—but I was looked upon as *cracked*! at least upon political subjects and then in the autumn of 1858 came the great controversy between *Lincoln* & *Douglass*—when people began to open their eyes a little; when the name of my friend was mentioned. The next winter I visited Springfield while their Legislature was in session.

I enquired who were *Lincolns* partial friends and influential withal. I was told that *Leonard Swett* a very able Lawyer and a member of the Senate was perhaps his most influential political friend. Ascertaining that there was to be a reception at the house of the *Governor (Bissell)* that night I thought that my best opportunity perhaps to make the acquaintance of *Swett* and other of *Lincolns* friends. I went expecting to meet *Lincoln* there himself—but he did not come. I then introduced myself to *Mr Swett* & told him my convictions in the matter of *Lincoln* as a future candidate for the Presidency and there gave him my reasons therefor. It was a small gathering—and soon I found myself surrounded by the warm friends of my namesake and then & there I proposed to them a plan of proceedure which if carried out by his friends would I thought result in giving to *Ill* the next candidate.

It seemed a new thought to these gentlemen—for all they hoped for was to place him *second* on the ticket *That* they thought would be easy—but to *head* the ticket was a new idea. *Seward* seemed to have the whole field. But I spoke as an Eastern man knowing that *Seward* was damaged somewhat by the perpetual howl of the New York Herald that he was a full fledged *abolitionist*! (which name he never, to the day of his death truly deserved) while on the other hand *Mr Lincoln* had not been in Washington to be mixed up with the *Helper Book matter* or any other matter requiring *defence. One hundred & ten* had declared their regard for him at Phil[a] and the *Douglass* controversy had given Mr Lincoln a national reputation among thoughtful men.

I returned to New York by way of Columbus O. and the City of Washington—calling upon my friends at the Capital—I knew but few—but among them were *Owen Lovejoy* of Ill & *John F. Potter* of Wis. To these I declared my views—but that *anybody* but myself saw the thing possible—did not appear. I sought *Mr Greeley* and had a long talk with him. and also with *Gov Morgan*—who was Sewards warm friend. Gov Morgan took down from his case a copy of the doings of the Phil[a] convention and read to me a speech made there by some western man—a rough subject—who had nominated *Mr Lincoln* there. I went to *Parton* to see if he would not write a *life* of *Lincoln*—but he said he had no *impulse* that way—while he liked the man—but he could not write without *impulse!* Said he could write the life of *Burr* whom he disliked because he had an *impulse* to do so.

Another year rolled arround when I again found myself in the west. *Carpenter* in his *'Six Months at the White House'* tells the story of my finding at *Naples* on the Ill. River an old man by the name of *Pollard Simmons* who told me the story of *Lincoln* having lived with him while yet a young man and working—among other things at *Splitting Rails!* When Simmonds told me that story I said to myself—I would not take the vote of *three small states* for *that* fact.

In occasional letters to the *New York Tribune* & to the *Press & Tribune* of *Chicago* I had taken occasion to say kind words for *Lincoln*—but not as a Presidential candidate—and when I reached *Sandoval* in Southern Ill I wrote a letter to the *Press* and *Tribune* giving the facts of my interview with Mr Simmonds & also some fact concerning Lincoln which *Shelby Cullom* (late M. C. whom few will remember) gave me in relation to the manner of his (Lincolns) studying law. These facts were taken from my Chicago letter by the New York Tribune and published a few days later under the head of *Personal of Lincoln.* My object was accomplished. My friend was now advertised as a *Rail Splitter* and the use made of that political *war club* was all that I could have reasonably asked. I think it was even better than the *Hard Cider* dodge.

I again sought *Swett.* He was practicing law in court at *Bloomington*—before Judge *David Davis* I again went over my programe—and when he had heard me he asked me to wait until the court adjourned for he wanted me to talk to *Davis* as I had done to him. This I did.

I kept busy as best I could up to the time of the meeting of the convention and finally wrote the leading communication in the *Press & Tribune* published the morning the convention met from my place of business in New York—claiming as a New Yorker that *Lincoln* would make a better run than *Seward.*

Three weeks ago I met in *Chicago Mr Swett.* He took me by the hand and said *Mr Lincoln*! you were the first man who gave us any confidence in our state that we could nominate *Lincoln.* He had said the same before at my house in Brooklyn.

Believing that I had something to do in giving courage to *Mr Lincolns* home friends, and having furnished the *Rail Splitting* club for the party I thought you might be interested sufficiently in my story to read it.

Two little incidents I will relate which may, under the circumstances interest you. Early in January 1861 I visited my friend at Springfield. Spending an evening at his house by invitation—in the course of conversation the President remarked that he had tendered to *Mr Bates* a seat in his Cabinet and asked me what I thought of it I told him that I thought it a proper appointment in all respects—and especially a compliment to a class with whom *Mr Bates* had acted politically and who had come in with us. I then said *Mr President!* Pardon me if I tell you what else I would do—and then I said "were I in your place

From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 3. Carl Schurz.

I would say to *Mr Seward* Sir!—what have I at command that you will accept? You can be my *Secretary of State* or if you prefer—the court of *St James* is at your service[”]—At this *Mrs Lincoln* rallied with “Never! Never! Seward in the Cabinet! Never! If things should go on all right—the credit would go to *Seward* —if they went wrong—the blame would fall upon my husband. Seward in the Cabinet! *Never!*” I then stated to *Madam* that she had not waited to hear the remainder of what I had to say—which was *this* “That will be *your* part I hope *Mr Seward* will have the sense of propriety and *delicacy* to say in reply” - “Sir! I am a *Senator* and just now I desire nothing more.” *“I do not desire to see Mr Seward in the Cabinet” Mr. Lincoln* performed his part—but the sense of *delicacy,* & as it seemed then to me *propriety* was lacking upon the other side.

I may be ungenerous, but I can never divest my mind of the impression that had the result of the war been the reverse of what it was—there would been few tears to be shed by *Somebody*!

One other story & I will worry you no farther. In the early part of 1867 I was in Wisconsin, and spent a day at *East Troy* with *Hon John F. Potter.* He then related to me what occurred at the rooms of the *Sec of State* in the early part of *1861. Schultz* name had been mentioned as a candidate for a mission abroad and one afternoon (Says Potter) “Doolittle & myself called upon the President to advance Mr *Schultz* interests.

The President said “Yes. I am in favor of giving Mr *Schultz* a foreign appointment—but the Secretary opposes it.” and begged of them to call upon the Secretary in relation to it. This seemed strange said Potter—for as between *Lincoln* & *Seward* at Chicago—*Schultz* was a *Seward* man. So they called upon *Mr Seward* and stated their business. Mr S. answered that he was utterly opposed to sending men abroad who were exiles and whose opinions were obnoxious to those to whom they were acredited—and therefore was opposed to the appointment of *Mr S. Potter* then said to the *Sec* “—I thought we sent men abroad to represent *our* views—not *theirs*!” After exhausting all argument with the *Sec* to no avail—they arose to depart—Saying as they went that *Mr Schultz* would be disappointed at not having his cooperation in the matter. At this the Sec. rose in great rage—swinging his arms and rushing across the room exclaiming “dissappointed! disappointed! talk to *me* about disappointment! look at *Me*! *simply a clerk of the President*![”]

You may have heard *Sec Stanton* tell this story of the Spanish Minister who called upon him one day and declared himself *thus “Stanton*! you have the *funniest* country here of all the earth—you have *no* government—but you move along—all the same—just as though you had[.] Stanton! there are three things which God almighty seems to take special care of *viz Drunkards*! *Little children* and the *United States of America*![”]

That “special care” it seems to me was our national salvation.

Sincerely thanking you for your timely labor to protect the reputation and precious memory of our mutual friend

Believe me
with great respect
Your friend
Geo. B. Lincoln

How reliable a witness was George B. Lincoln? Can we really believe a man who claimed, fourteen years after the fact, to have originated the famous “rail-splitter” image? If George Lincoln was shrewd enough to realize in 1856 that Abraham Lincoln could take the Republican nomination from Seward, he was more politically astute than most of the politicians in America—moreso even than Abraham Lincoln himself. Did George Lincoln really ask James Parton to write a campaign biography in the winter of 1858-1859, months before the idea occurred to Abraham Lincoln's political intimates in Illinois? Did Abraham Lincoln, as President-elect, really invite the would-be Brooklyn postmaster to Springfield and discuss Cabinet appointments in his presence? Would Mrs. Lincoln, whose knowledge of the intentions of her husband's administration never appeared very strong, have been present at such a discussion? Could a small-time politician who could not recall Carl Schurz's name accurately have possibly known the things he claimed to know? In short, was George B. Lincoln a blowhard or a knowledgeable insider?

We can never know the answer for certain, but there is some good evidence that George B. Lincoln was not a thoroughly reliable witness. The Illinois State Historical Library, for example, owns a letter from the Brooklyn politician to Francis B. Carpenter which is an admission of error in telling a story about President Lincoln. Carpenter, who had spent six months in the White House painting a canvas which celebrated the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, capitalized on his experiences after the President's assassination by publishing reminiscences in various periodicals. Some of these were Carpenter's own recollections, but others he gleaned from other associates of the President—including the Brooklyn postmaster. On December 19, 1867, George B. Lincoln told Carpenter: “I notice in the papers a card from Ex Governor Seymour of New York denying the truthfulness of the alleged interview between the late President Lincoln & himself—as reported in your reminiscences of Mr. Lincoln as published in the Independent of the 12th inst. Having stated this story to you—as it was given to me—*falsely* as it now appears I take the earliest moment to express my regret that I should have been the means of furnishing an item untrue in itself and offensive to all concerned.” He went on to explain that he had been fooled by the wealth of details supplied by his informant.

To his credit, George B. Lincoln did apologize to Carpenter

and allowed him to use his letter as an explanation of the error. Moreover, this incident is not enough to cause historians to dismiss all of George Lincoln's assertions of contacts with the President. In Carpenter's book, *Six Months at the White House*, published a year before the article with the Seymour story, the Pollard Simmons anecdote appeared. In addition to the rail-splitting incident, George Lincoln had also repeated Simmons's story that Abraham Lincoln had refused a surveying job offered him by a Democratic appointee as surveyor. The future President was reputed to have said, ". . . I never have been under obligation to a Democratic administration, and I never intend to be so long as I can get my living another way." Carpenter asked the President whether the story were true, and he replied: "It is correct about our working together; but the old man must have stretched the facts somewhat about the survey of the county. I think I should have been very glad of the job at that time, no matter what administration was in power." Once again, George B. Lincoln was partly in error—but only partly. He seems to have been consistently guilty of repeating stories about Abraham Lincoln without checking his sources, but he may well have repeated accurately what he heard.

Without doubt, George B. Lincoln did have some contact with his more famous namesake. He had opportunities to visit Illinois as the representative of a New York dry goods firm. Carpenter himself saw George Lincoln in the President's office on the Sunday before Lincoln's reinauguration in 1865. And several letters in the Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress prove that George B. Lincoln had occasional contacts with the President.

George Lincoln wrote his first letter to Abraham Lincoln on May 19, 1860, just after the Republican nominating convention. He congratulated the Republican nominee and chatted for a while about their common surname. An old Whig himself, the less famous Lincoln noted, "I have never known a Lincoln who was a *Loco Foco*! Not one—all have been Whigs to a man." In 1860, he claimed to have declared his faith in Abraham Lincoln's ability to gain the Republican nomination "East and West for near two years"—not, it should be noted, since 1856. He feared that Hannibal Hamlin "will not greatly improve the ticket anywhere that we need help—but it does not *drag*—we are safe." He closed the letter by saying, characteristically, "I am about sending to *Father Simmonds at Havana* for a couple of those *'Rails'*!"

On September 22, 1860, George Lincoln wrote the nominee again, mentioning "our mutual friend [Shelby] Cullom," from whom the Brooklyn travelling salesman had obtained "some time ago a profile likeness of yourself—for which you kindly sat to gratify an enthusiastic young republican—(an *ex* democrat) who desired to issue from it a campaign medal." George Lincoln sent by "your worthy neighbor Mr. Alvey," who was returning to Springfield, some presents to Abraham Lincoln's children: "a few specimens of the Medals—which are here considered the best which have been issued." "Please present them as complimentary from *William Legget Bramhall* and our two sons—lads—who are 'Lincolns too,'" he wrote jovially. He also sent photographs to the boys and to Mrs. Lincoln. He concluded the letter with observations on the political scene in New York. Central New York state was safe, the Know-Nothing vote was safe, the disappointment over Seward's loss of the nomination was largely abated, and the old Southern Whigs with whom he did business thought the Union would be safe in Abraham Lincoln's hands.

After the election George B. Lincoln sent the usual recommendations for office and letters of introduction for businessmen seeking favors. President Lincoln was still seeing correspondence from George Lincoln in 1864. Like almost all politicians in New York, the Brooklyn postmaster became embroiled in the patronage controversies surrounding the New York Custom House. The Lincoln administration's Indian Commissioner, William P. Dole, visited New York early in 1864 to investigate the controversy. After his return, George Lincoln wrote to inform him of strong sentiment for the appointment of Simeon Draper as Collector. He said that Hiram Barney, the incumbent, was very unpopular. Though he made clear his own opposition to the interests of Salmon P. Chase, he did not stress Barney's alleged pro-Chase affinities as an objection to his continuance in office. He argued, rather, that Barney was very unpopular with merchants and that mercantile people did not want a lawyer as the Collector. Lincoln also mentioned in the letter the fact that he kept a bust of the President draped in a flag in his home in Brooklyn.

George B. Lincoln was a windy old bore. Of that there can be no doubt. His letter to Welles covered seven and one-half pages of paper. His affection for President Lincoln—which grew out of the coincidence of shared surnames—was genuine, however. He did have some close contacts with the Lincoln administration. Though he tended to be somewhat uncritical in repeating stories he heard about the President, George B. Lincoln might have known what he was talking about. From all evidence political bias did not account for his willingness to think the worst of Seward. After all, the opposition to Hiram Barney was led by the Seward-Weed wing of the Republican party in New York, and he had clearly been with Seward's men in that fight. George B. Lincoln's anecdotes may be questionable, but they certainly appear worthy of further investigation.

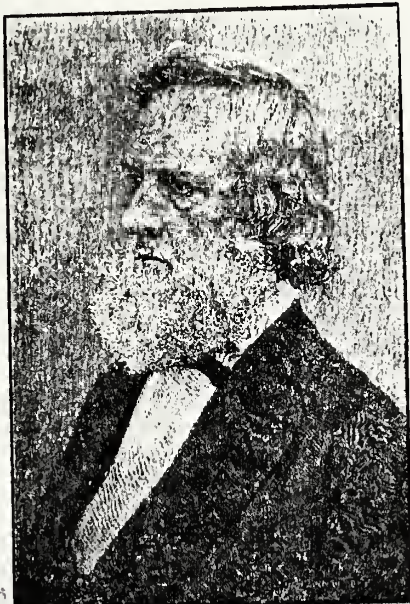
From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 4. As late as 1863, Seward still had a reputation as the strong man in the administration.

Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy, was a man of this character. He was a citizen of Maine, and had been active in the preceding election in behalf of the Republican party. Of navies and war he knew nothing, but he did know that in order to prosecute a war a nation must have a navy.

Welles took his office at a time when energy and action were as much needed as technical training. Had the officials at Washington exhibited the same tireless energy that Welles exhibited the war would have been over in three months. In fact, there would have been no war. Had 200,000 men been put into the field at once the south would never have plunged into war.

Welles adopted this policy in regard to the navy. When he was appointed Secretary of the Navy the total armed fleet of the north numbered less than 50 vessels. He set about building, buying and equipping vessels until at the close of the war approximately 500 vessels constituted the navy of the north.


GIDEON WELLES.

Had Welles been possessed of a technical training in naval matters and thoroughly trained in seamanship, the probabilities are that he would not have been as successful as he was. He would have been appalled by the lack of trained men, adequate navy yards and material. His very ignorance of naval matters and his failure to realize the almost insurmountable obstacles in his way were the salvation of the navy. He plunged into the work without realizing the difficulties that he had to meet. The crying need was a navy and he set about creating one. He ordered ships built and when the capacity of the yards was taxed he purchased them.